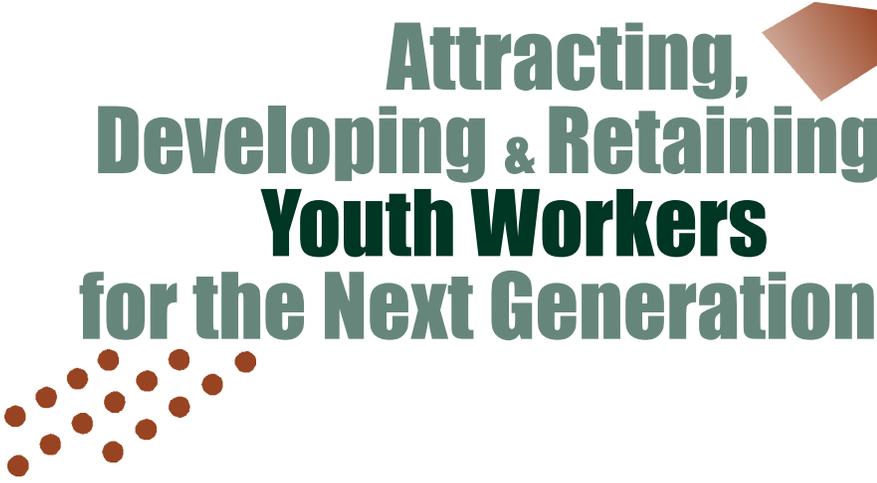


Wingspread Conference Proceedings

November 16-18, 2004

Attracting, Developing & Retaining Youth Workers for the Next Generation



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This report is meant to inform and engage individuals in the next steps of building a national professional development system for youth workers. It summarizes a Wingspread Conference on Attracting, Developing and Retaining Youth Workers for the Next Generation, held in November 2004. It describes the research conducted to document the need, highlights the background materials used to inform Wingspread participants, and summarizes the results and outcomes of the conference.

Introduction



“Any strategy that says, ‘This is a profession. This is a real job. This is a career.’ as its foundational philosophy, is going to make a difference for the field of youth work.”

-Interviewee

On November 16-18, 2004 a groundbreaking event, the Wingspread Conference on “Attracting, Developing and Retaining Youth Workers for the Next Generation,” was held at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine Wisconsin. The purpose of the conference was to engage key entities from a range of organizations in creating a collaborative, comprehensive strategy to attract, develop, and retain youth workers within the field of youth development. The Conference provided a unique opportunity to work across organizational lines to build on and coordinate the outstanding work already being undertaken to address professional development issues in the field of youth development.

The 30 individuals who attended, brought leadership, expertise and diverse experience in the field. The participants represented federal agencies; national youth organizations; higher education; national and local intermediaries; state, city-wide, community-based programs; and policy and funding organizations. By accepting the invitation to participate in the two-day Wingspread Conference, these individuals made a commitment to work collectively at the conference and in the following year to create and support two to three comprehensive strategies aimed at ensuring the presence of caring, qualified youth workers in the lives of our nation’s youth.

At the Wingspread conference, participants took the bold step of designing the initial framework of a comprehensive strategy for building a coordinated national professional development system for youth development professionals.

What is a Wingspread Conference?

Wingspread conferences are small, intensive meetings sponsored by the Johnson Foundation and convened in partnership with nonprofit organizations, public agencies, universities, and other foundations. The Johnson Foundation sponsors conferences in the public interest and provides a forum for people who are knowledgeable about the issues, willing to reexamine their assumptions, and are determined to reach solutions.

The system they envisioned includes consistent standards and competencies for youth workers, quality training and education, an effective learning delivery system, identified and varied career paths, guidelines for compensation, and effective use of research and evaluation. At its best, the Wingspread conference confronted the key factors that create barriers to attracting, developing, and keeping youth workers, especially the fragmentation of current efforts. The courage, intellect, and commitment of the participants led to systemic rather than organization-specific strategies that will advance the work of building a nation-wide comprehensive professional development system for youth workers. Participants succeeded in working together as partners rather than adversaries.

Making the Case



“How do we get past the public perception that anyone can do this work? We will always be struggling, if people cannot get past this perception. We need to recognize the professionalism of our youth workers.”

-Wingspread Participant

Like most organizations across the United States and around the globe, youth organizations need highly skilled, knowledgeable workers. There is an inaccurate and detrimental view that anyone can do youth work. In fact, a youth worker must be equipped with a broad range of knowledge, skills, and behaviors and apply them in a variety of settings when working with young people.

As a career, youth work is both exhilarating and exhausting, and professional development is often cited as one of the key factors in attracting and keeping a talented workforce. As a field, there is a need to identify and document the critical needs of youth workers and to determine the key factors that play a role in professionalizing the field of youth development.

In 2003 the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the Academy for Educational Development (AED) Center for Youth Development and Policy Research released a strategic plan, entitled *Building a Skilled and Stable Out-of-School Time Workforce*. The plan recommended the following key strategies:

- Determine an initial set of standards for out-of-school time workers;
- Create a set of compensation benchmarks;
- Unite stakeholders at the local, state, and national level to advocate for resources to support high-quality programs and a skilled and stable workforce¹.

1 NIOST & Center for Youth Development and Policy Research/AED. (2003). *Strategic plan: Building a skilled and stable out-of-school time workforce*. September.

During consultations, leaders in the youth development field agreed that the most important ingredients for ensuring quality in out-of-school youth programs are staff recruitment, training, and development. Furthermore, in a 2004 report entitled *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time*², the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) documented a critical link between youth outcomes and positive relationships with skilled staff. HFRP has also reported that professional development activities for out-of-school-time workers can impact program quality on at least two levels: staff development can affect youth outcomes and impact the sustainability of the youth development work force.³

Interviews conducted by the University of Arizona for the Wingspread conference revealed that there is continuing demand for an effective mix of in-service and training opportunities, formal and informal mentoring, and networking among peers.⁴ Despite the prevalence of professional development activities and their potential benefits, evaluations measuring and verifying the quality and usefulness of professional development are limited. Given the relationship between staff development and higher quality programs, including better youth outcomes, there is a critical need for stronger evaluation to understand the benefits of professional development efforts.⁵

It could be argued that any investment in youth workers and in program quality is an investment in young people. However, there is little information available about the factors that attract and keep youth workers. Indiana Youth Institute conducted a study in 1999 that inquired about the specialized needs of youth workers and the extent to which those needs were being met by their communities. The report, *Youth Work: More Than Child's Play*, profiled the Indiana youth workers and identified their responsibilities, the professional development tools they needed, and the career incentives they wanted. Unfortunately, this same valuable information is not available in most other states or at a national level.⁶

Many conditions are at odds with developing and keeping a healthy, productive human services workforce. The 2003 report, *The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform: The Condition of the Frontline Human Services Workforce* documented heavy workloads, long hours, high vulnerability to burnout, and high turnover among the most talented employees. The report, produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, goes on to reveal that significant numbers of minorities in the human services workforce do not have access to essential resources, receive low pay and few rewards for talent and achievement, and in general, reported a dissatisfaction with the low level of respect received for their work.⁷

2 Bouffard, S. & Little, P. (2004) *Promoting quality through professional development. Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*. Harvard Family Research Project, No. 8. August.

3 Ibid

4 Wingspread Conference, (2004). *Summary from interviews conducted for the Wingspread conference. Attracting, Developing and Retaining Youth Workers for the Next Generation*. November.

5 Bouffard, S. & Little, P. (2004) *Promoting quality through professional development. Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*. Harvard Family Research Project, No. 8. August.

6 The Indiana Youth Institute. (1999). *Youth work: more than child's play*. The Indiana Youth Institute, Indianapolis Indiana. www.iyi.org

7 Casey Foundation (2003). *The unsolved challenge of system reform: The condition of the frontline human services workforce*. http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/hswi/report_rev.pdf

The lack of respect received for working in human services is not limited to minority audiences. There is also a perception among college seniors and the individuals charged with helping them make career decisions that the nonprofit sector does not offer viable career options. Staff in Offices of Career Services (OCS) perceive that students are profoundly disinterested in nonprofit sector careers and attribute this to low salaries, lack of career advancement, and students' limited knowledge of the sector. OCS directors admit that they also have limited knowledge of the nonprofit sector and say they need better resources on nonprofit sector careers and stronger connections with nonprofit sector employees. As a result, talented young people, including youth workers, who are needed in the nonprofit sector are not being recruited by colleges for the next generation.⁸

In the early 1990's the Wallace Foundation (formerly the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund) granted over 55 million dollars to support professional development in youth-serving organizations over ten years. This was the largest private support received for professional development activities and the only major national foundation to recognize professional development as a high priority.⁹ Grantees accomplished a great deal of work toward the understanding of staff development efforts and issues in national youth-serving organizations. A report published by the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, reported that the funding was critical to youth-serving organizations in addressing issues of recruitment and development of staff¹⁰. Since that time, foundations have shown little interest and support for funding professional development initiatives for youth workers. A wide range of issues continue to challenge the field:

- Low wages and inadequate benefits for workers;
- Youth work has a poor image and is not valued;
- Scarcity of intentional career paths;
- A general disinterest in the nonprofit sector within society;
- Lack of assessment data on youth worker needs;
- Inadequate evaluation of the impacts of professional development;
- Limited foundation interest in professional development.

8 Cryer, S. (2004) *Recruiting and retaining the next generations of nonprofit sector leadership*. The Initiative for Nonprofit Sector. New York University. The Forbes Funds.

9 Quinn, J. (2004) *Professional development in the youth development field: issues, trends, opportunities, and challenges*. Professional Development for Youth Workers, New Directions for Youth Development, Jossey Bass. Winter.

10 Ogletree, R., Garg, S. Robb, S. & Brown, P. (1995). *Strategic analysis of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund's grantmaking in support of the recruitment and development of youth workers*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Observers outside the United States are struck by the sophistication of youth programs in the U. S., but stunned by the lack of infrastructure and policies to support the programs. In *Reflections on the Road Not (Yet) Taken: Professional Development for Youth Workers*, Pittman describes the long standing commitment by the British government to recognize and value youth service and offers key aspects of the British model as a template for building a national system of supports for U.S. youth workers, not only within programs but between people and among communities.¹¹

Despite the significant barriers, many basic elements of a mature professional development system have begun to emerge within the field of youth work.¹² For example, there is general agreement about what is needed in a system:

- Competencies identified for all youth workers that are clearly communicated in order to counter the perception that youth work is an unskilled profession;
- Multiple pathways into the field of youth work such as internships and mentoring;
- Adequate compensation and stimulating work environments that help retain workers;
- Career paths within jobs (differentiated levels of direct service work), between jobs (clearer paths between direct service and management), and across organizations (better definitions of what a youth work career might look like across organizations); and
- Standards for youth programs and organizations.

While considerable progress has already been made in each of these areas, current efforts are fragmented and tend to be organization-specific. A greater collective focus is needed to effectively attract, develop, and keep youth workers for the next generation. The time is ripe for putting systems in place that will raise the status, viability and effectiveness of the youth development profession.

Documenting Existing Efforts

In preparation for the conference, planners used a combination of methods to collect and document existing efforts, cite gaps and identify work that still needed to be accomplished. They:

- Conducted interviews with national, local, and direct service providers;
- Asked several thought leaders to analyze the interview results and make recommendations;
- Conducted an initial scan to identify key documents from the existing knowledge base; and
- Asked attendees to complete a pre-conference assignment.

11 Pittman, K.J. (2004). *Reflections of the road (not yet) taken: How a centralized public strategy can help youth work focus on youth. Professional Development for Youth Workers*, New Directions for Youth Development, Jossey Bass. Winter

12 Ibid

Interviews and Analysis

Seventeen individuals, including national and local leaders, direct service providers and funders, were interviewed to discover their insights and expertise about existing and possible new strategies for attracting, developing, and retaining youth workers.

With this background, two nationally recognized thought leaders in the field of youth work (Jane Quinn and Karen Pittman) analyzed the content and made preliminary recommendations for the content and structure of the Wingspread Conference. The interviews, while not meant to be a comprehensive summary, provided useful background information and resulted in a list of strategy recommendations that aided in the discussion at the Wingspread conference. (See Appendix for Strategy Recommendations.)

The following are a sampling of the strategy recommendations that emerged from the interviews:

- Determine the role of standards and research;
- Develop a career track, education and internship continuum;
- Expand professional development opportunities;
- Deploy technology more strategically;
- Seek collaborative organizational development opportunities;
- Develop a positive image for youth work as a profession.

The interviews and the resulting strategy recommendations underscored the importance of addressing professional development issues in a collaborative fashion across organizational lines.

Existing Knowledge Base

In addition to the interviews and analysis, research and articles were examined to identify high-priority needs pertaining to attracting, developing and retaining youth workers. See Making the Case. Attendees were required to read selected documents including:

- A strategic plan for the out-of school time workforce;
- New studies on the current status of the human services workforce including youth workers;
- An analysis of recruitment on college campuses for the non-profit sector; and
- An examination of the United Kingdom's youth work system.

Additional reading was included in the pre-conference packet and participants were invited to bring other pertinent materials to share with participants at the Wingspread conference.

Setting the Stage at the Conference: Definitions, Vision, and Projects

The participants began their work by establishing a shared definition of “youth worker”:

A youth worker is an individual who works with or on behalf of youth to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society as they make the transition from dependence to independence.

This definition focuses on outcomes for young people rather than where youth work occurs. It represents a shift in thinking beyond time and place and across organizational boundaries. The emphasis on working with and on behalf of young people reflects the broad scope of individuals and groups—community-based organizations, intermediaries, national organizations, and universities, for example—that are committed to advancing the field of youth development.

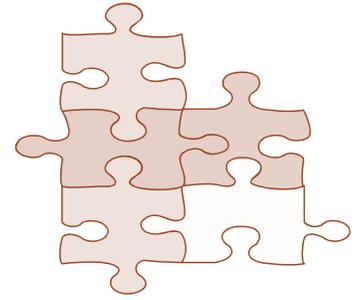
The group also reached a consensus on a vision of a systemic approach to attracting, developing, and sustaining youth workers:

The vision is to create a practice-, research- and evaluation-based learning and professional development system that enables and reinforces continuous learning and development as a professional standard and a component of professional self-definition.

The vision was designed to encompass existing work in the field and new work yet to be undertaken, and to connect all of the important elements of a coordinated system.

Defining a Coordinated System

Pieces of the Puzzle



In order to tap the collective knowledge and expertise of the participants they were asked to complete the following assignment sometime before the first session of the conference:

“What are the key components of a coordinated system that would increase our ability to attract, develop and retain youth workers. The answers to this question provide key pieces of a puzzle that must be assembled as we move forward with our work. Use your experience, knowledge and expertise to fill in each puzzle piece with a component that you feel is critical to professional development in the youth development field.”

When conference participants submitted their assignments (to identify key components of a coordinated professional development system), the puzzle pieces they provided were rich, complex and very diverse. However, because each participant approached the assignment so differently, it was impossible to distill a set of key components. After a stimulating discussion, group members were able to focus collectively on the big picture and identify the key pieces of the professional development puzzle. In other words, they were able to articulate the components most important for creating a national system.

- 1) **Standards/competencies** for the field and accountability at all levels for those standards/competencies.
- 2) **A training and delivery system** for all direct service workers and volunteers
- 3) **A career ladder and plan to reinforce and compensate** workers for continued professional development and movement on the career ladder.
- 4) **A strategy for evaluation** – evaluating the impact of the system.
- 5) **An external support plan and strategic communication campaign** that achieves a higher level of visibility for the youth development profession.

Once the five components of a coordinated professional development system were identified, participants met in 5 small groups to discuss one component of the system in greater detail. Each group was assigned one of the components and asked to identify key challenges, positive efforts already happening, ways to build on existing efforts, and any systems-level recommendations related to their particular component.

After giving an initial report, participants returned to their small groups to determine one key recommendation and up to three strategies to help accomplish their recommendation. A brief summary of each defined component and the final recommendations follow.

1. Standards and Competencies

Agreement on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in youth work at various levels of the system.

The focus on standards and competencies was not intended to create something new, but rather to agree upon standards for professional development and leverage competency models that exist within and across organizations. Consistency in standards and competencies would also serve as a springboard for developing certification and other credentialing efforts that might result.

Recommendation and Strategies:

By 2008, a set of widely adopted core competencies and performance indicators align and unify youth development professionals in practice (direct service), programs (organization/program development), and policy (strategic and systems development).

- Launch a core competency initiative working across organizations, associations, and current structures based on three phases: knowledge development, consensus building, and adoption;
- Collect, identify, and synthesize existing data and create or clarify core competency areas which cover youth work at various levels of the system;
- Provide opportunities for sharing, feedback, and revision;
- Encourage adoption through accountability, buy-in, and support and maintenance of the core competency structures.

2. Training and Delivery System

Aggressive development of a learning system that attracts, develops, and sustains youth workers.

A training and delivery system is needed for all direct service youth workers including assessment and access to learning for continuing professional development. Key aspects and elements of the training and delivery system would include preservice; formal training (school, university degree programs); less formal training (sequential training through two-day to week-long workshops); on-the job apprenticeship experiences; and in-service received from conferences, workshops and training offered by the organization or by a local or national intermediary. A comprehensive training and delivery system would involve expanding existing efforts, increasing the coordination of training and professional development experiences and enlarging peer networks.

Recommendation and Strategies:

Aggressively develop a learning system that attracts, develops and retains youth workers. This system is cohesive, policy-driven, and credential based providing multiple pathways to demonstrate competency as evidenced by portfolios and other assessments.

- Create a prototype of what the learning system should look like. This may include an environmental scan or the development of a national advisory board.
- Develop a process to vet the learning system with those in the youth development field.
- Launch demonstration projects to test components of the learning system.

3. Career Ladders and Compensation Guidelines

Explicit mechanisms for attracting workers to the field and for ensuring fair and adequate pay along the continuum of their careers.

Career paths and compensation are essential to building a professional system and should be inextricably linked to the other components. For example, mechanisms should be in place to ensure that youth workers receive increased compensation for demonstrating agreed-upon competencies and participating in professional development that improves performance.

Recommendation and Strategies:

Conduct a study that defines the current state of: career ladders; compensation (wages and benefits; environments and working conditions); entry and exit from and mobility within the field; recruitment and retention; and demographics: who comes, stays and leaves the field.

- Scan existing studies, databases; engage existing networks of youth workers for pertinent information;
- Engage youth workers in assessing the current states of knowledge; identifying key issues for further study and design; conduct one or more studies around the issues;
- Use results to identify key factors that attract and sustain people in the field including career ladders, adequate compensation, and cost effectiveness of developing and retaining youth workers;
- Adopt and promote compensation guidelines for professionals in practice and programs.

“The attempt to develop a career ladder within the field is also important. Generally, what tends to happen is that someone is really good at being a youth worker, and they end up becoming an executive director of an organization whether they want to or not.”

-Interviewee

4. Evaluation

The creation of basic evaluation approaches that address key questions, including whether and how professional development improves practice and whether and how improved practice leads to improved youth outcomes.

Recommendation and Strategies:

Develop and launch a proactive research and evaluation agenda that is integrated into and guides the transformation of the youth work professional development system and that assesses its progress and effectiveness.

- Develop a research and evaluation agenda to guide the transformation of the youth work professional development system;
- Seek out and establish research partnerships to advocate for and advance the work;
- Initiate studies that test assumptions and engage youth workers;
- Utilize technology to more quickly and deeply understand the issues from broader and deeper perspectives – especially that of youth workers themselves.

5. External Support Plan and Strategic Communication Campaign

The creation of a strategy that makes the case for a national professional development system; builds alliances and partnerships to help secure external supports (policy, funding, etc.) at all levels; and communicates about the system in a manner that creates excitement, interest and ultimately demand for the system.

The small group that worked on this component proposed the creation of a system that would be national and would self-regulate youth development activities rather than waiting for Congressional mandates, such as Sarbanes-Oxley, to tell the field what it must do. The system would be designed to increase the capacity of the field of youth development while watching for opportunities to fund this work. While people generally supported the ideas of the group, there was concern that other aspects of a communication strategy had not been fully addressed. After much discussion, Wingspread participants decided that the issue of external support and communication was more of a strategy or approach integral to all of the components, than a key component unto itself. They decided to omit this as a key component, reducing the number of components to four.

Building a Professional Development System



“Connecting to youth workers in ways that truly reach them is what is most important to this system. The focus needs to be on connecting with the youth worker not around and above them.”

-Wingspread Participant

As small groups reported on each of the final four components of a professional development system— standards and competencies, training and delivery system, career ladder and compensation guidelines, and evaluation – a matrix of sorts began to emerge. For each of the four components that had been identified, there were four major areas of strategic work that lay ahead:

- Knowledge Development,
- Consensus Development,
- Adoption, and
- Strategic Communication and Support.

Knowledge Development

There is a critical need to gather and synthesize existing research that would address the four components of a national professional development system: standards and competencies, training and delivery system, career ladders and compensation, and evaluation. The youth work competency frameworks that currently exist need to be examined in order to identify gaps in the conceptual work. Knowledge about the nature and needs of the current workforce such as entry and exit data, turnover rates, and compensation patterns is also critical to the system, but currently the data is fragmented. Creation of the learning delivery system itself would build on existing work, but there are many gaps in what is currently available. Conducting a gap analysis would be a major component of the knowledge development phase of the work needed to build a professional development system.

Consensus Development

Group members calculated that it may take 10-15 years to build a high quality and enduring professional development system for youth workers. Throughout this time, it will be critical to involve representatives from the many sectors of the field to elicit both their input and their feedback on the system components. Ongoing, authentic involvement of direct service workers is particularly important. The Wingspread group envisioned several approaches to consensus development, including surveys of the field, formal and informal consultations, and the formation of advisory groups.

Adoption

A national professional development system—once implemented—will only be as strong as its impact on youth workers and on their daily local practice. For an effective system to be fully embraced by youth workers it will require explicit support mechanisms at all levels—national, regional, state, and especially local. Youth workers and their employers need a venue to ask compelling questions, get straightforward answers and learn how their involvement in a national professional development system would directly benefit them and their work with young people.

Strategic Communication and Support

The Wingspread group agreed that the timing is right to craft a self-regulating professional system within the youth work field. For example, the United States Congress is monitoring the work of the non-profit sector through legislative vehicles such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. A recent study showed that the Sarbanes-Oxley Act’s corporate governance reforms for public companies are also having an impact on the operations of nonprofit organizations. The youth development field should proactively agree upon, support, and enforce standards of professional practice rather than waiting for Congressional mandates that prescribe what must be done. The standards and the resulting supports should be broadly communicated throughout the youth development field and to all of the stakeholders in which youth development operates, including funders and policymakers.

Strategic communication will also help achieve a higher level of visibility for the youth development profession.

National Professional Development System

	Knowledge Development	Consensus Development	Adoption	Strategic Communications and Support
Standards and Competencies				
Training and Delivery Systems				
Career Ladders and Compensation				
Evaluation				

While this initial vision of a system generated a lot of energy and excitement, participants identified some concerns to keep in mind. For example:

- Ownership and accountability of the system: Who will take responsibility for advancing each piece of the puzzle and how will they do it?
- Accessing the system: Where is the demand that generates the system if neighborhoods and communities do not work on behalf of youth? How do we build a system that is driven by demand rather than supply?
- How does the system get consistently and intentionally linked to everyday practice? How do we ensure engagement with, and ownership by, youth workers?
- What are the best ways to get buy-in across organizations, agencies, communities, and so on?

Summary and Next Steps



“Everything comes down on the youth worker. This conference has helped me feel invigorated and I look forward to implementing our results.”

-Wingspread Participant

Participants agreed to continue the collective work of building a national system of professional development with youth workers. They chose the “Margaret Mead” approach for providing short-term leadership and guidance to the effort. This approach calls for a small, energetic and balanced group of people that make a commitment to move the group’s recommendations forward through its first year. Several participants raised the importance of having representation from different sectors of the field (direct service workers, national youth-serving agencies, local and national intermediary organizations, Federal agencies, etc.) on the Guiding Group. Ten participants were nominated and agreed to serve on the Guiding Group.

Over the next year, the Guiding Group will work together to:

- Document and publicize the results of the conference
- Determine how to frame and launch the initiative
- Carry out the initial buy-in work
- Identify individuals or “champions” to advance the initiative
- Write a proposal for a planning grant
- Identify potential sources of funding for the planning grant as well as subsequent long-term implementation.

All participants agreed to volunteer their personal expertise, use their channels and networks to communicate the results of the Wingspread conference and generate interest in the idea of a national professional development system for youth workers.

The Wingspread conference was grounded in the knowledge-base of past efforts to support professional development in youth-serving organizations. It acknowledged the remarkable progress that has been made and brought key entities to the table to collectively address continuing challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining youth workers in the field.

Individuals who participated in the Wingspread conference shared a passion for youth development, were knowledgeable about the issues, and genuinely committed to raising the status and recognition of people that work with and on behalf of young people. The diversity of the participants was an important aspect of the conference: representatives came from national, state, and local youth development organizations and intermediaries, colleges and universities; and funding organizations. These differing experiences, priorities, and perspectives all brought strength and clarity to the task. This includes the voice of the youth workers themselves. They brought a community, ground-level perspective, with a call to action to move beyond local needs and organizational boundaries for the benefit of the field.

Although each participant brought a distinctive viewpoint, there was a collective sense of readiness—indeed, an urgency—to propose interrelated strategies to respond to the broad needs of youth workers and discover new ways to bring individuals into the field and help them develop professionally.

As a result of the work that was begun at the Wingspread conference, there is increased momentum for building a national system for professional development for youth workers. With continued energy and support from across the field, it is possible within the next decade that youth workers will:

- See an increased respect and visibility for their work
- Be willing to enter or stay in the field as a result of better wages and compensation
- Access on-going learning experiences regardless of their position or geographic location
- Have confidence in their ability to make a difference in the lives of youth.

This increased competence on the part of youth workers and their increased positive impact on young people, their families, and communities will be felt across the nation.



“A nation that truly wants no child left behind must make sure that workers who care for children, youth, and families have the motivation, resources, and support to succeed.”

-The Health of the Human Services Workforce Report, 2003

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Strategy Recommendations

From Interviews Conducted for the Wingspread Conference

In preparation for the Wingspread Conference, seventeen interviews were conducted and transcribed (see summary for more specifics of the interviews). Our purpose was to gather information about strategies used to attract, develop and retain youth workers for the next generation. The following are the strategies recommended.

This is not meant to be a comprehensive summary, but a way to help facilitate discussion on this topic. It is evident that there are several strategies that cross all three areas: attracting, developing and retaining. These strategies have been identified here only as a framework and is not meant to indicate that these fit in only one area. For example, technology, public relations and compensation are issues that cut across all three areas.

Strategies to Attract Youth Workers

Develop a Career Track/Education/Internship Continuum

- Create a system that aligns several components: established youth worker competencies; training programs that teach these competencies; organized trainings (pre- and in-service) that support an educational/career ladder; supports to enable workers to access and utilize training; training supplemented by coaching, mentoring and supervision; and adequate compensation linked to competencies observed in actual practice.
- Be more intentional at the college/university level by increasing the number of career track programs on campuses. This would include certificate and degree programs at all levels. It would be also important to engage more interest from career services personnel on campuses to support students interest in this work.
- It will be important to look to the nonprofit sector as a significant internship venue to be included in the education process of those interested in working in the field of youth development.
- Provide more internship opportunities for high school and college students to increase their awareness of youth work as a career option.
- Consider second career and early-retirement professionals as a likely (and talented) pool of candidates for youth work.

Deploy Technology More Strategically

- Move to open, free, accessible information available to the broadest possible publics and audiences. Make youth development knowledge more accessible to others through “open source” strategies, such as the Internet, and through infiltration of other fields, such as K-12 education.
- Make the best use of technology to attract individuals to the field by advertising employment and professional development opportunities.

Develop a Positive Image for Youth Work as a Profession

- Reframe youth development as everyone’s responsibility, not limited to those who go into the field specifically to work with youth. Broaden the discussion about the importance of youth development to more than the usual group. Examples include the corporate sector, education, government, faith community, neighborhood associations, and others.
- Create more positive visibility through such activities as a public service campaign, a national marketing plan, or by building on recent statements by Presidential candidates and other high profile elected officials about the importance of after-school programs.
- Stress the importance of developing leadership in youth, focusing on working not with ‘clients’ but youth who are rich resources that can be developed with proper support and mentoring.
- Emphasize the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children—mentoring or facilitating the healthy development of children rather than simply babysitting.

Strategies to Develop Youth Workers

Expand Professional Development Opportunities

- Create more opportunities for youth development professionals to network with one another as a means of addressing isolation, sharing best practices, and increasing their confidence in working with young people.
- Formalize opportunities to recognize youth workers for their work with young people, for mentoring and teaching others, and to renew themselves, including their commitment to youth development work.
- Continue to make use of a broad range of approaches to assist youth workers, including training, mentoring, consulting, career counseling, listservs, scholarships for continued learning, processes for dealing with their own feelings in the face of intense work, performance bonuses, attendance at conferences.

- Forge stronger links between youth development organizations and college campuses to increase pre-service and in-service opportunities.
- Work across organizational lines to share professional development opportunities

A Role for Standards and Research

- Use research-based delivery systems to assure measurable outcomes in professional development activities.
- A coordinated and strategic effort is needed in order to increase the knowledge, skills and competencies of youth workers.
- Set and maintain standards as one means of establishing youth work as a profession. Standards are equally important to establish for *organizational* self-review. For example, certification of entry-level youth development practitioners has been established by the Department of Labor and could be expanded.

Collaborative Organizational Development Opportunities

- Look at the private sector market economy and entrepreneurial social ventures for ideas on how to enhance or transform the field.
- Learn to collaborate as opposed to viewing other youth organizations as competition.
- Identify the different kinds of training opportunities that are available in order to reduce redundancy, approach funders collectively, and *as a group* to give voice (nationally, locally and at the state level) to the vital importance of youth workers and the field of youth development.
- Have programs be purpose-driven rather than activities-driven by cross training in jobs.
- Organizations must move away from grant funding as the financial base for their programs. Cultivating individual donors is the best fund development policy for the future. Diversifying the funding base is essential for stability and continued viability. (Also an arena for greater collaboration between youth serving organizations.)
- Get funders more involved in supporting best practices in youth development.
- Look to other disciplines (e.g., child care, accounting, medicine, business) and other countries (e.g., United Kingdom) for examples of professional competencies and systematic change that lead to positive youth outcomes.
- Collectively develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the future of youth work.

Strategies to Retain Youth Workers

Employ Technology as a Retention Tool

- Take advantage of technology innovation as a means of both increasing the professionalism of youth workers and also reaching out to the field. For instance, use distance learning to provide skill improvements that make upward mobility more accessible, to provide continuous education and training and to expand the diversity in training options.

Nurture the Profession and its Personnel

- Create a cultural shift that values youth workers in the same way as other professions. This should include a common basis of theory and practice for the field.
- Raise salaries, invest more in professional development, and establish recognition programs for youth workers.
- Track people throughout their careers in order to learn more about career ladders, movement within the nonprofit sector, and in youth development specifically.
- Evaluate professional development experiences and opportunities to make sure they are meeting the outcomes and having an impact on the targeted youth worker audience.

Appendix A

Interviewees

Sarah Berry-Rabun – *Boys & Girls Clubs of America*

John Brandon - *Marion County Commission on Youth*

Willis Bright – *Lilly Endowment, Inc*

Wanda Ealy - *Boys & Girls Clubs of America*

Deth Im – *YouthNet*

Elaine Johnson - *National Training Institute for Community Youth Work (NTI) at AED*

Kyle Malone – *Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Indiana*

Laurie Ollhoff – *Concordia University*

Bonnie Politz – *Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at AED*

Suzanne LeMenestrel – *Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at AED*

Shonda Russell - *Indiana Youth Institute*

Annie Smith - *Youth as Resources Program of Central Indiana*

Bill Stancykiewicz – *Indiana Youth Institute*

Dorothy Stoneman – *YouthBuild USA*

Kala Stroup – *American Humanics*

Janet Wakefield – *Community Partnerships with Youth*

Wendy Wheeler - *Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development*

Appendix B

The Interview Process

We selected these individuals to increase our understanding of how the field of youth development can raise the status of youth workers and provide recognition to people who work with and on the behalf of young people. These individuals offered an understanding of the diversity of all the different youth development organizations; intermediaries, colleges and universities could be one of our most important assets. National and regional efforts, differing priorities and degrees of focus all bring strength and power to the field of youth development.

We asked the following ten questions during the telephone interviews:

- Briefly describe your efforts attracting, developing and retaining youth workers.
- What, in your opinion, are the most important strategies currently being used to attract, develop and retain youth development workers?
- What about these strategies make them the most important?
- What are our biggest challenges in attracting, development and retaining youth workers?
- Given both our current strengths and existing challenges, which of these strategies do you think could make the greatest impact if increased or enhanced?
- What steps are needed to make this happen?
- How will we know, again, explicitly, whether we are accomplishing the identified change?
- What outcome markers or milestones will we measure so we can make continuous improvements, and can demonstrate our accomplishments to other constituents?
- Where do you think the development of standards does or doesn't fit in these strategies?
- If these strategies were implemented, how do they think they would ultimately impact the development of youth workers and outcomes with young people?

1905 Youth Development Leadership, Masters of Education

established, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.

1926 Edith Macy Curriculum Center

is established as a site of skill enhancement courses for Girl Scout volunteers and staff.

1920s Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development

developed as part of Tufts University, to create research projects, outreach programs, scholarly resources, practitioner tools and collaborative connections to promote healthy positive development among diverse children, adolescents, families and communities.

1937 The Boys' Clubs Executive Association

forerunner of the Professional association, organized for Club director.

1970s National Youthworker Education Project

University of Minnesota offers an extended course of study to carefully select emerging leaders in the youth work field.

1985 4-H Professional Research and Knowledge Base

is established as the foundation for the 4-H youth development profession. (Revised in 1995 and 2004.)

1900 – 1940s

1970s – 1990s

1946 National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA)

developed as a professional's organization for those dedicated to promoting, strengthening, enhancing, and advocating for the 4-H Youth Development profession.

1948 American Humanics Program

established as an innovative course of study that equips college and university students to become skilled professionals and leaders in American youth and human service agencies.

1987 National After-School Association (formerly NSACA)

is established as a professional association for those dedicated to the development, education, and care of children and youth during out of school hours.

in the Youth Development Field

1990-94 DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

grants over \$55 million to support professional development in youth development organizations.

1993 Stronger Staff: Stronger Youth Conference and Report

AED/CYD and national organizations develop proposed definitions for youth work, youth worker competencies, youth outcomes.

1992 Conference held resulting in the publication of: *Enhancing the Professional Development of Youth Workers: Recommendations for the Field* AED/Center for Youth Development and Policy Research Conference with National Youth-Serving Organizations.

1993 Conference on Youth Workers at the Community Level

Conference with resulting meetings and resulting paper – *Characteristics of an Effective Community-Based Training System: Infrastructure Requirements for Building Staff and Organizational Capacity at the Local Level* – AED/CYD and agencies with community-based training systems.

early 1990s

1992 Human Resource Clearinghouse Services

human resources clearinghouse developed by National Collaboration for Youth to assist youth-serving organizations in developing practices and policies that strengthen their ability to recruit and retain staff – becomes **National Youth Development Information Center** – www.nydic.org.

1993 Clemson University established the **Department of Family and Youth Development.**

1994-99 *Survey of Salaries and Benefit in the Youth Development Field* National Collaboration for Youth.

1994-95 *Directory of Internships in Youth Development*

Indiana Youth Institute and National Collaboration for Youth.

1997 **National Training Institute (NTI) for Community Youth Work**

established at AED founded to work with BEST (Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers) Initiative (14 youth development intermediaries providing youth development training and technical assistance using the Advancing Youth Development Curriculum).

1994-2002 **Funders support American Humanics**

to dramatically expand the number of colleges and universities that offer the American Humanics certificate in nonprofit management.

1998 **YouthLearn Initiative**

launched by the Morino Institute and currently directed by Educational Development Concepts (EDC), offers youth development professionals and educators comprehensive services and resources for using technology to create exciting learning environments.

late 1990s

1996 **Strengthening the Youth Work Profession Conference**

and resulting publication with recommendations – University of Chicago – Chapin Hall.

1998 **Forum for Youth Investment**–

founded by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, produces products, provides training, and technical assistance to those who work with and impact youth and ultimately helps implement the accumulated knowledge and skills in specific locations to ensure youth are ready by 21 for work, college and life.

in the Youth Development Field

1998 Concordia University Youth Development Program

began – to provide further education and training for those wanting to work in the field of Youth Development.

2000 Youth Development Practitioner

established as an Apprenticeship occupation, Office of Apprenticeship Training, Employer and Labor Services, US Department of Labor, October. \$1.45 million dedicated in 2001 and \$900,000 in 2002 for local intermediaries to support local youth program service operators in the implementation of apprenticeship programs.

2002 Community Programs to Promote Youth Development

edited by Eccles and Gootman, published by the National Academy Press.

2000 Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance

founded the online Youth Development Masters Program. Colleges Involved: Montana State University, North Dakota State University, South Dakota State University, University of Nebraska, Colorado State University, Kansas State University, Oklahoma State University, Texas Tech, Iowa State University, and Michigan State University.

2000 – 2004

1999 Strom Thurmond Boys and Girls Club Leadership Institute

established by James Barker, President, Clemson University.

2002 YouthBuild USA launched Academy for Transformation

to accelerate youth transformation through consulting, on-site training, practice groups, and publications.

2002 Educating Youth Development Professionals

Current Realities, Future Potential, published by the University of Arizona.



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